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Personality In The News

Ray R. Best Had Close Call With Detention Camp Mob

By Ray Canton

On a dark night in November, 1943, Raymond R. Best stood in the shadow of a building at the Tulelake Segregation Center and watched 250 Japanese who were armed with clubs and sticks and talked in loud voices.

They were the chief troublemakers in a camp of 18,000 Japanese, most of whom had admitted disloyalty to the United States. Best was manager of the huge Modoc County center, which was under the direction of the war relocation authority. Because of the strong arm tactics of the hard core of troublemakers, Tulelake had earned the reputation of being among the worst of all civilian detention camps in the United States during World War II.

Life Was Endangered

From the shadows Best heard someone shout a sentence that will live with him the rest of his life:

"Let's get Best!"

His life was at stake. He raced for his nearby home in the camp. He told his wife, Nora, to put out the lights and make sure she and their two sons, Jack and Ray, Jr., and his elderly mother stayed away from the doors. Then, seconds before the communication lines were slashed by the angry mob, he telephoned for help from the army troops which had made their headquarters outside the camp.

Army tanks, armored cars, machine guns and fixed bayonets soon put down the riot and the night of terror ended safely for Best and his family. It was an incident which gained international attention, front page stories across the country and ended with a congressional investigation.

Government Career

Best, who retired recently as supervisor for the federal bureau of land management after 32½ years of government service, recalled the Tulelake riots as he sat in the spacious garden of his home at 2733 Panay Court in Carmichael.

"I guess you could say that was a close call. I had another one about three years ago when I suffered a heart attack.

"But I think I have had the greatest life anyone could have and you couldn't plan it.

"My education ended after I was graduated from the Los Angeles High School in 1913. Yet my wife and I have had the thrill of living in such places as Washington, DC, and Geneva, Switzerland. In fact, when we had a family reunion with our three sons a while ago they pointed out we had moved more than 20 times.

"Whenever I was asked when I would be ready to take a new job, I would reply 'I was ready yesterday' and go on my way.

"But you must have a good wife or you can't do these things."

New York. Russia didn't like it and I stayed out of Berlin.

"My heart went out to these people. They came from countries that were liquidated like Latvia and Lithuania. They didn't have a government or a home as a result of a war that was fought on their land. It is distressing to follow up a war.

"At one time I had 17 army transports coming and going between Europe and New York.

"I left after 14 months because I couldn't stand it any longer. I visited the camps frequently and people would get on their knees and beg to go to the United States. It tore my heart out when they could not produce the proper security clearance and I would have to tell them they couldn't go."

Work With Bureau

After his return to the United States he worked for the bureau of reclamation in

Fresno. In 1953 he transferred to the bureau of land management and worked in Washington, DC; Denver, Colo., and Cheyenne, Wyo., before moving to Sacramento in 1955.

Last April Best was selected to be chief of the branch of administrative services in Washington, DC, but he turned down the post.

"If I had been 10 years younger I would have taken the job," he said. "But I have read of too many men working on until they are about ready to die."

Since his heart attack Best has trimmed his weight from 176 to 155 pounds and has learned to pace himself. Travel, of course, has not been stricken from the Best schedule. They will make trips to visit with their three sons—Jack of Fresno; Ray, Jr., of Modesto, Stanislaus County, and Robert T. of Seattle, Wash.



Raymond R. Best measures the towering blooms on an acanthus shrub in the garden of his Carmichael home. Bee Photo

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Overseas Post

In 1948, a little more than two years after he had liquidated the Tulelake center, Best began a 14 month tour of duty in Geneva. He directed the United States program for displaced persons in camps in Germany, Austria and Italy. He traveled extensively in the three countries, but stayed clear of Berlin.

This was because among the first of the eventual 120,000 displaced persons admitted to the United States under his direction, were 100 orphans from several countries, who were in Berlin.

"The orphans were within our domain, but the Russians wanted them," said Best. "Before the Russians knew what was going on I had the orphans flown by airlift from Berlin to Munich and then to

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